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ABSTRACT

The policy series reported on in this brief engages policymakers from executive and state government in discussion with researchers and practitioners serving fathers and families. Each meeting of the series brings together a regional cluster or cohort of states. Discussion topics include: (1) coordination of fatherhood activities between federal and state governments, between different non-governmental organizations, and between different agencies within the same level of government; (2) relationship development (e.g., between policymakers in different state governments; between policymakers and practitioners; and among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers); and (3) social welfare, fatherhood, child support, and family efficacy. This brief presents the proceedings of the May 2000 meeting held by the Mid-Atlantic and New England states. Included are brief individual state reports on related activities and issues. Overall key findings and recommendations for policy, practice, and research from the meeting are also presented. (EV)

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State Policy Series on Family Support and Father Involvement: A Summary of Activities and Issues in Mid-Atlantic and New England States

NCOFF State Policy Series Brief

2000

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National Center on Fathers and Families

STATE POLICY SERIES BRIEF

State Policy Series on Family Support and Father Involvement:

A Summary of Activities and Issues in Mid-Atlantic and New England States, 2000[1]

NCOFF Briefs provide summaries of literature reviews, research reports, and working papers published by NCOFF and of emerging practice- and policy-focused issues in the field. This Brief describes the sixth meeting in the ***State Policy Series on Family Support and Father Involvement****. The formal meetings are intended to build on discussions and efforts in family support, responsible fatherhood, and child well-being, particularly recent initiatives and developments around welfare reform. Copies of NCOFF Briefs are available in paper form or online at www.ncoff.gse.upenn.edu.*

NCOFF is grateful to its funders: the Annie E. Casey Foundation, which provides core support; the Ford Foundation; and the Charles S. Mott Foundation.

Key Themes

- Participants stressed the need for a more family-sensitive approach to corrections, public safety, juvenile justice, and similar agencies.
- As a way of promoting and sustaining interagency collaboration around father involvement, each entity and its representatives at various levels must be able to articulate a consistent rationale for their work.
- It is imperative that fatherhood advocates initiate a dialogue with their respective state legislators regarding issues of concern.

Recommendations for Research, Practice, and Policy

- Ensure that program design includes empirical evaluations in order to assess program effectiveness.
- Provide continuous staff training and development to promote the proper implementation and execution of policy changes.
- Create a family-friendly environment in the visiting rooms of corrections facilities, and train corrections staff to be sensitive to and supportive of family interactions.
- Improve service coordination and case management for incarcerated and ex-offender fathers and their families from incarceration through post-release.
- Standardize corrections programming so that individuals have access to similar resources and opportunities for growth and rehabilitation.

PS 030722

State Policy Series on Family Support and Father Involvement:

A Summary of Activities and Issues in Mid-Atlantic and New England States, 2000[1]

Designed as a forum to discuss state-level policy developments, the *State Policy Series on Family Support and Father Involvement* engages policymakers from executive and state government in a discussion with researchers and practitioners serving fathers and families. Each meeting of the State Policy Series brings together a regional cluster or cohort of states. Discussion topics include:

- Social welfare, fatherhood, child support, and family efficacy
- Coordination of fatherhood activities between federal and state governments, between different nongovernmental organizations, and between different agencies within the same level of government
- Relationship development (between policymakers in different state governments; between policymakers and practitioners; and among policymakers, practitioners, and researchers)

This Brief describes the proceedings of the sixth meeting in the Series, which was convened in Princeton, New Jersey on May 11-12, 2000. County-, state-, and federal-level policymakers and practitioners participated, representing nine states: Connecticut, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont.[2] The meeting was sponsored in collaboration with the Vera Institute of Justice, New Jersey Department of Human Services, and the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Participants were asked to describe and summarize the following:

- Their states' mission, goals, objectives, and expectations for responsible fatherhood, family support, and child well-being
- The degree to which current and planned activities are coordinated with state departments and agencies serving children and families
- State processes, issues, and challenges
- Planning efforts for future activities
- Needs around planning coordination and delivery support to children, families, fathers, and communities

WELCOME

Excerpts from the welcoming address of *Commissioner Michele K. Guhl, New Jersey Department of Human Services*

It is a great honor to host policymakers from throughout the region. I am confident we will learn a great deal from one another over the next two days. For every child who is fortunate enough to have a father who shows love and commitment, too many children do not receive this support. They lack the reassuring touch, the loving discipline, and the security of a father's devoted presence. This serious national problem—and the detrimental effects it has on children—affects inner cities, suburban areas, and rural communities alike. The question is: How do we, the architects of social policy, help fathers connect or reconnect with their children? I think we all understand better than ever that we cannot hope to promote responsible fatherhood unless we promulgate laws and policies that encourage father involvement—or, when necessary, force fathers to support their children. Old rules and tired assumptions no longer apply. We need to rethink our traditional view of mothers and fathers in the family matrix.

Clearly, national welfare reform reminded us that fathers should not be forgotten when it comes to demonstrating personal responsibility. Until the massive reforms at the federal level four years ago, policy discussions about welfare reform and child protection focused primarily on mothers and children (the old AFDC model) without considering the role and responsibility of fathers.

But the focus is changing here in New Jersey—and indeed throughout the nation—as we adopt a more holistic view of the family, and of the rights and responsibilities of all of its members, in policy development. In New Jersey, we are starting to integrate fathers more fully into the social services system. In

[1] State-level activities have expanded since the date of this meeting. Reports presented here reflect efforts prior to May 11, 2000.

[2] Representatives from Delaware, Washington, DC, and Maine did not attend the meeting. However, a representative from Maine did submit a written report of state activities around fatherhood.

this effort, we are fortunate to have strong support from our Governor, who has appropriated additional dollars in the upcoming budget for an array of new fatherhood initiatives now being developed.

We also need to stabilize the relationship between incarcerated fathers and their children. This significant challenge is clearly one that we should—and will—discuss seriously at this conference. As difficult as this program area is, it is a subject that must be pursued if we are to restore the father-child bond and end the seemingly interconnected cycle of fatherlessness and incarceration that has plagued some urban communities.

I believe this conference will serve as a positive forum for tackling this and other tough issues. I hope we will take the opportunity today to question our assumptions, to stretch our thinking, and to find new and innovative ways to make our vital community partners part of a lasting solution. We, here in New Jersey, look forward to learning about innovative practices in other states and welcome the cross-pollination of ideas that so often occurs at these regional gatherings. Thank you.

STATE REPORTS

Moderated by Malcolm Smith, Director of Policy, Center on Fathers, Families, and Workforce Development

Connecticut

State Reporter: Elizabeth Browne, Policy Director, Connecticut Commission on Children

Since the State Policy Series meeting with Mid-Atlantic and New England states in June 1999, the Department of Social Services (DSS) has made a number of advancements: it has created an inventory of programs in Connecticut serving fathers; it has either sponsored or has been represented at numerous statewide, regional, and national conferences on fatherhood; and it has selected individuals to serve on the Fatherhood Advisory Council's eight working groups. Working group themes include: Family and Child-Focused Parenting (formerly Child Support, Custody, and Visitation), Fatherhood Preparation and Support, Paternity Establishment, Pilot Site Design and Evaluation, Pilot Site Selection, Program Inventory, Public Awareness, and State and Local Agency Collaboration.

In addition, Connecticut's DSS issued a request for proposals from qualified private, not-for-profit organizations to implement comprehensive community-based programs that promote the positive involvement and interaction of fathers with their children, encourage and enhance responsible and skillful parenting, and increase the ability of fathers to meet the financial and medical needs of their children. The contract period spans from July 1, 2000, through June 30, 2002.[3]

The next steps include the selection and implementation of research demonstration sites, the continuation of a public awareness campaign, and the continued development of activities to improve service delivery for children, fathers, and families.

Maine

State Reporter: Paul Hachey, District Supervisor, Division of Child Support Enforcement, Department of Human Services[4]

The Division of Child Support Enforcement with the State of Maine's Department of Human Services has entered into a partnership with the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) Transitional Employment Program of the City of Portland's Division of Social Services. This partnership was created as part of a grant application for U.S. Department of Labor WtW funds in the Round III Competitive Grant process during the spring of 1999. Social Services targeted noncustodial parents and identified the Division of Support Enforcement and Recovery as a primary source of referrals for the recruitment process. The City of Portland Division of Social Services will draw participants not only from city neighborhoods but also from Cumberland County, which is Maine's most heavily populated region. Social Services has initiated a similar partnership with the C.A.P. Agency of Washington County, which operates in a region that traditionally has reported Maine's highest unemployment rates.

Also, the Division of Child Support Enforcement has collaborated with the judiciary system and the Maine District Courts to establish and secure funding to establish a Family Court. Three goals of the collaboration include: (1) providing a venue through which both parents can mediate and resolve issues pertaining to the welfare of the family; (2) offering parent education courses; and (3) raising awareness of the effects divorce and family conflict have on children.

[3] Information retrieved from the World Wide Web, May 9, 2000, from http://www.dss.state.ct.us/rfp02.htm.

[4] This state report reflects a brief summary of responsible fatherhood activities in Maine submitted to NCOFF by Mr. Hachey, since he was unable to attend the meeting. We are grateful for his effort and hope that Maine will be represented at future Series meetings.

State Maintenance of Effort funds support the Parents as Scholars program, which allows participants who are eligible for welfare to pursue a two- or four-year degree. The Maine Association of Independent Neighborhoods and the Maine Equal Justice Project were leading advocacy groups for this program.[5]

Maryland

State Reporter: Mark Veney, Child Support Enforcement, Department of Human Resources

Maryland is a state that led early efforts to recognize and support services for fathers and has since significantly expanded such outreach in this area throughout the state. Veney was enthused to announce that, on July 1, the Maryland Child Support Enforcement Administration plans to launch a debt-leveraging program that targets noncustodial parents who owe large amounts in arrears. The new approach is intended to emphasize parents' emotional and psychological contributions to child development, particularly when financial difficulties become barriers to parental involvement.

Percentage of Children Living with Parents without Full-Time, Year-Round Employment by State, 1997

Rank	State	Percentage
11	Maryland	22%
13	Vermont	24%
13	New Jersey	24%
17	Connecticut	25%
19	Delaware	26%
19	Pennsylvania	26%
25	Massachusetts	27%
25	New Hampshire	27%
30	Rhode Island	28%
36	Maine	29%
48	New York	34%
51	Washington, DC	49%

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Book. *Baltimore, MD: Author, 2000.*

In more general terms, Maryland offers a wide array of programs and services. Over 1,200 men have benefited from case management and aftercare service referrals provided by Maryland's Initiative for Fathers and Families. The Initiative assists men in life skills development, employment training, and child support modification. Serving approximately 600 families, the Access and Visitation Program provides activities and services, such as parenting classes and mediation, to encourage interaction between noncustodial parents and their children. The Young Fathers/Responsible Fathers Program offers a similar set of services to foster productive relationships between unwed or expectant fathers and their children. Maryland's Driver's License Suspension Program has collected over $103 million in child support funds since 1996. A pilot project initiated in October 1998, Maryland's Dads Make A Difference program trains teens between the ages of 16 and 18 to engage middle-school-aged teens on the responsibilities of parenthood.

Massachusetts

State Reporters: Richard Claytor, Director, Boston Responsible Fatherhood Project, Massachusetts Department of Revenue

Claytor commented that women moving from welfare to work benefit from an organized, systemic support system. He stated that his goal is to create a parallel system for men facing similar challenges of limited education, inconsistent employment history, and immediate familial responsibilities. Claytor discussed specific efforts and activities moving Massachusetts closer to reaching that goal.

The collaborative of agencies and organizations providing services to fathers in Massachusetts includes the Massachusetts Department of Revenue, Division of Child Support Enforcement; Boston Private Industry Council; Family Services of Greater Boston; STRIVE, Boston Ten Point Coalition; Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund; and Boston Healthy Start. (Claytor added that, by the end of 2001, four MELD sites would join the collaborative.) Last year, the collaborative issued a list of recommendations for state agencies to encourage responsible fatherhood. These recommendations were used to organize a summit on responsible fatherhood held in June of 2000.

[5] National Campaign for Jobs and Income Support, *Poverty Amidst Plenty: Amount of Unspent Federal Anti-Poverty Funds Grows Despite Persistent Need.* Washington, DC: Author, 2000.

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In October of 1999, the Massachusetts Department of Revenue's Division of Child Support Enforcement hired a workforce development coordinator to assist partner agencies and organizations in identifying strategies to help fathers secure gainful employment. One of the Department's first efforts was to conduct a series of job fairs in three county houses of corrections. Based on the success of the events in employing incarcerated fathers, Claytor argues that men with criminal records can indeed get jobs. Similarly, Massachusetts Job Training, Inc. assists individuals seeking employment. The organization partners with the judicial system to assess referred individuals' abilities and needs.

The Father and Family Network, sponsored by the Massachusetts Children's Trust Fund, hosts monthly luncheons for practitioners working with fathers to share best practices and provide peer support. The network has over 600 members.

Percentage of Children Living in Poverty, 1997

Rank	State	Percentage
1	New Hampshire	8%
7	New Jersey	14%
7	Maryland	14%
7	Connecticut	14%
14	Massachusetts	15%
14	Vermont	15%
14	Delaware	15%
21	Maine	17%
21	Pennsylvania	17%
27	Rhode Island	18%
40	New York	25%
51	Washington, D.C.	36%

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Book. *Baltimore, MD: Author, 2000.*

New Hampshire

State Reporter: Kristina Toth, Program Administrator, Family Resource Center, Lake Regional Correctional Facility

Toth explained that, at present, there is minimal interagency collaboration around fatherhood in the state of New Hampshire. However, there are pockets of outreach activities and efforts promoting responsible fatherhood. Specifically, the Department of Corrections, in collaboration with the University of New Hampshire's Cooperative Extension and its Department of Family Studies, has instituted the Family Connections Project. Supported by a grant from Governor Jeanne Shaheen, the program seeks to reduce delinquent behavior, such as drug use, among children with incarcerated parents by serving incarcerated parents, their spouses/partners, and their children. Toth noted that 66 percent of male inmates in state institutions are fathers.

Program components include training for correctional officers to conduct parenting education classes and support group activities for inmates, monitored parent-child visits in an area designed to provide a warm environment for healthy family interaction, a library of children's books and parenting resources, and outreach to spouses/partners. In the coming year, program administrators plan to link inmates' children to local youth development programs and spouses/partners to parenting education and other resources in their communities. Students in the Family Studies Department will be trained to facilitate support groups for youth and work in the play and recreation rooms, as well as observe and offer feedback to incarcerated parents on their interactions with their children. Toth also mentioned that the state sponsors a hospital-based parenting "boot camp" for dads.

The Phoenix Project is another outreach effort to fathers in New Hampshire. Based in Concord and sponsored by the Department of Human Services, the small pilot program works with noncustodial fathers.

New Jersey

State Reporter: Alisha Griffin, Director of Child Support Enforcement, Department of Human Services

Griffin believes that New Jersey has made a strong commitment to programming for fathers. The state's Department of Human Services goals include increasing child financial support, enhancing work engagement, expanding WorkFirst New Jersey to include noncustodial parents, developing support systems for fathers, linking incarcerated fathers with their children,

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assisting their post-release transition, and promoting staff sensitivity and awareness of father-related issues.

Key collaborations with other state agencies and community-based organizations allows DHS to provide a range of services to fathers, including group counseling, peer counseling, and mentoring:

- Operation Fatherhood (a program within the Union Industrial Home of Trenton) provides job training, job support, and job placement services meant to enhance noncustodial fathers' wage earnings and child support compliance. Funding is supplied by the Division of Family Development of the New Jersey Department of Human Services, several New Jersey-based foundations, and private donations.
- Parents Anonymous of New Jersey coordinates support groups for young minority fathers. The groups, titled Parenting Our Successors in Society Effectively (POSSE), seek to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect among young minority fathers. They provide participants with affirming experiences that support the development of leadership skills.
- The New Jersey Office of Child Support and Paternity Programs sponsored a media campaign titled "Child Support, It's More Than Just Money." The campaign focused on Essex, Hudson, and Camden counties. It included television and radio public service announcements, transit ads, movie theatre ads, a website, community presentations, "Train the Trainer" presentations, and a school curriculum.
- NJKidCare provides children in families who cannot afford private health insurance with free or reduced coverage. Estimates cite that currently 92,000 eligible children are enrolled in the program. Corporate sponsors include the New Jersey Nets, McDonald's, and K-Mart.

Griffin discussed the next steps for New Jersey fatherhood advocates: cataloguing the current programs and services, evaluating the degree to which regulations and policies are father-friendly, broadening the diversity and range of programs and services for fathers, and collaborating with the U.S. Department of Health to recreate their success with the Healthy Mothers/ Healthy Children Program.

New York

State Reporters: Alana Sweeny, Executive Director, New York State Council on Children and Families; Janice Bibb-Jones, Coordinator, Community Affairs, Office of Children and Family Services, Department of Family Assistance; Monique Rabideau, Program Outreach Specialist, Division of Child Support

Sweeny provided a broad overview of New York's activities around responsible fatherhood. As Executive Director of the Council on Children and Families, Sweeny is charged with coordinating interagency collaboration around services for children and families. She recognizes engaging fathers as an important component of her work. Supporting her in this effort are programs such as Touchstones, which unites New York State agencies around common goals and outcome measures for children, strengthens agencies' capacity to assess system performance internally, and integrates children's policy and program development across all areas of health, education, and human services.

Bibb-Jones described recent developments in Adolescent Pregnancy and Prevention Services, including the more than doubling of the program's budget for 2000 through TANF funds. The increased funding has expanded existing community service projects and extended programs into previously underserved areas. Bibb-Jones noted that one-third of fatherhood programs received a one-time appropriation.

Additional developments around responsible fatherhood and welfare reform include the following:

- Programs in Harlem and Bedford-Stuyvesant have joined the Partners for Fragile Families demonstration initiative, which was designed to help low-income, noncustodial fathers become self-sufficient and develop stronger relationships with their children and their children's mothers.
- "Family Support New York Conference 2000: Linking New Yorkers through Family Support" was held on May 17-18, 2000. The goal of this conference was to unite family members, service providers, and policy makers under the banner of family support. It promoted strengths-based, family support

principles and practices as ways to change how services are provided to children and families in New York. Workshops were provided in four areas: Strengthening Family Support Policy; Enhancing Family Support/ Family Development Practices; Broadening Involvement; and Increasing Knowledge.

- The International Fatherhood Conference 2000: Fathers, Families, & Communities, held on May 29-31, 2000, was sponsored by the National Center on Strategic Non-Profit Planning and Community Leadership and hosted by New York City.

Pennsylvania

State Reporter: James Tice

The Pennsylvania Fatherhood Initiative is a collaborative effort among the state departments of Community and Economic Development, Corrections, Education, Health, Labor and Industry, Public Welfare, and the Board of Probation and Parole. The following organizations recently received grants through the Initiative:

- The Males Achieving Responsibility Successfully program, run by Communities in Schools in Philadelphia, Inc., provides responsibility-training and family-strengthening skills to 30 noncustodial fathers at six public high school sites in southeastern Pennsylvania.
- The Employment Opportunity & Training Center of Northeast Pennsylvania provides parenting classes, family-stabilizing and -strengthening services, assistance in developing and implementing parental responsibility plans, and ongoing follow-up support to 20 low-income noncustodial dads.
- The Community Action Program of Lancaster County coordinates monthly programs, educational seminars, and support groups for noncustodial fathers in central Pennsylvania.
- Also in central Pennsylvania, the Lycoming-Clinton Counties Commission for Community Action, Inc., is developing the Lycoming County Responsible Fatherhood Program (RFP) to aid qualified, low-income noncustodial fathers. It will serve as a site to disseminate information and resources pertaining to responsible fatherhood and parenting, as well as a foundation to organize a community advisory board and media campaign.
- The Pittsburgh-based Hill House Association serves approximately 60 fathers per year, providing them with mediation counselors knowledgeable of the child support system, father-child outings, and fatherhood classes.
- The Our Creating Healthy Individuals and Loving Dads Program (Our CHILD), managed by Lawrence County Social Services, Inc., educates, counsels, and supports 30 fathers through a 12-session process that includes weekly support groups.
- Long Distance Dads, a collaborative effort between the Father's Workshop within Erie Family Center and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections through the State Correctional Institution at Albion, assists incarcerated fathers in becoming more involved parents.

Percentage of Families with Children Headed by a Single Parent, 1997

Rank	State	Percentage
4	New Jersey	22%
13	Maine	25%
13	Pennsylvania	25%
18	New Hampshire	26%
18	Vermont	26%
18	Maryland	26%
27	Connecticut	27%
27	Massachusetts	27%
38	Rhode Island	29%
46	Delaware	32%
46	New York	32%
51	Washington, D.C.	62%

Source: Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count Data Book. *Baltimore, MD: Author, 2000.*

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Rhode Island

State Reporter: Evelyn Henley, Clinical Social Worker, Department of Human Services

Rhode Island's strategies to promote father involvement focus on issues related to teen fathers, child support enforcement, and welfare.

The Father and Family Network sponsored a day-long strategic planning retreat with its stakeholders together to discuss fatherhood issues. The retreat resulted in the current planning of an event to bring attention to the needs of fathers.

The state's Department of Health is planning to launch a media campaign later this year on adolescent health. The target groups are parents, coaches, teachers, and others who interact with teens. The goal is to encourage these individuals to serve as positive role models. The media campaign includes television spots, radio time, and posters.

The Male Responsibility Project (MRP) was developed and is administered by the Adolescent Self-Sufficiency Collaborative (ASSC) of the Rhode Island Department of Human Services (DHS). ASSC serves pregnant and custodial teen parents (with an emphasis on those receiving public assistance) in five regions of the state. Its primary goal is to ensure the long-term economic independence of adolescent parents and their children. Male counselors from five community-based organizations who are under contract with DHS and already serve pregnant and parenting adolescent girls provide direct services. The primary purpose of the MRP is to prevent too-early fatherhood. MRP serves ten cities and towns, including the five cities with the highest rates of teen pregnancy in Rhode Island.

In November, DHS funded five male counselors to attend Wise Guys Male Responsibility Program Training in North Carolina. Wise Guys is an adolescent pregnancy prevention program for young men between the ages of 10 and 19. In 1998, Wise Guys was selected as a model program nationwide by the Urban Institute and the Sociometrics Corporation.

Managed by the Urban League of Rhode Island, The Young Father Program offers 63 fathers between the ages of 13 and 19 weekly counseling on issues related to responsible fatherhood. Twenty-two of the young men are currently incarcerated at the Rhode Island Training Institute; they will be provided with a contact in the community for follow-up upon release.

The Rapid Job Entry Program, offered by the Rhode Island Department of Labor and Training (RIDLT), receives referrals from Family Court when a father is unable to support his children due to unemployment or skills deficiencies. RIDLT performs an assessment and either assists the father in securing a job or, if appropriate, refers the noncustodial father to education, skills training, or other activities resulting in employment.

The Department of Health funds the Men to Be program to train men in five cities to serve as positive role models. In addition, the Department of Health offers a program, funded by the Department of Human Services, that provides a free vasectomy to volunteers as another option to unwanted fatherhood.

Vermont

State Reporter: Jordan Engel, Vermont Agency of Human Services

Engel informed meeting participants that, in the days preceding this meeting, the Vermont Senate passed Bill No. 0187, Accrued Paid Leave for Short-term Family Leave. The bill empowers the employer to determine whether accrued paid leave, such as vacation

Partners for Fragile Families Sites, January 1999

Baltimore, Maryland*
Boston, Massachusetts*
Chicago, Illinois
Denver, Colorado
Indianapolis, Indiana
Los Angeles, California
Minneapolis, Minnesota
New York, New York*
Racine, Wisconsin
West Chester, Pennsylvania*

***New England and Mid-Atlantic sites**

Source: National Center for Strategic Nonprofit Planning and Community Leadership web site (http://npcl.org/pff/sitedemo.htm).

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time, may be used for short-term family leave. Debate surrounding the bill focused on whether state policies reinforce traditional gender roles by emphasizing men's financial contributions to family well-being and child development and failing to acknowledge and support men's emotional and psychological contributions to their children and family. Fatherhood advocates in Vermont view their role as helping the state to develop and implement programs that would support father involvement beyond the traditional role of breadwinner.

To work toward that goal, fatherhood advocates in the area held their first conference in June of last year and scheduled a follow-up conference for June 2000. Engel described the first conference as primarily representing a media event, but stated the theme for the second as questioning how state agencies and

Moderated by Leonard Feldman, Director of Research and Evaluation, Office of Policy and Planning, New Jersey Department of Human Services

On-the-Spot Innovation: Exercise Description

During the conference's working group session, participants were divided into five teams and presented with a case study—a profile of an incarcerated father. They were asked to use their experience and ideas to brainstorm about policies, practices, and research that would help the individual described in the case study maintain contact with his family and successfully transition back into community life after incarceration.

Questions posed to the groups were designed to help participants identify barriers to parental involvement from an incarcerated or ex-offender father's perspective, as well as to develop ideas about the intervention, innovation, and interagency collaborations that would help overcome these barriers and support the well-being of families. Participants were provided with a diagram to help them keep in mind the many agencies, circumstances, and people with whom an incarcerated or ex-offender father might be involved.

Case Study Synopsis

Darren was convicted and sentenced to prison on a nonviolent drug offense. He is in the third year of a five-year term, and will most likely be released on parole within the next nine months. He is the father of three children, aged 3, 8, and 14 years. He has never married. He is estranged from the mother of his two eldest children. The mother of his youngest child lives in public housing. She is in the process of applying for TANF support. The mother of his two eldest children receives public assistance.

Darren has neither a high school degree nor a GED. Before being arrested, he worked intermittently as an auto mechanic. His mother and grandmother provided financial support when he had no income. While in prison, he has amassed child support arrearages for his eldest children. Darren's anticipated parole conditions include 80 hours of outpatient drug treatment.

Questions Posed to the Working Groups

What might prevent a father like Darren from contributing emotionally and financially to his children's well-being? Are these personal or policy barriers? What services or support would or do help a father like Darren overcome these barriers while incarcerated? Pre-release? Post-release?

SYNTHESIS OF THE CORE ISSUES

Barriers to Paternal Involvement

The working groups identified various barriers facing incarcerated and ex-offender fathers, ranging from attitudinal and personal obstacles to policy barriers: parenting inexperience; absence of an incarcerated father's own father; attitudes of prison or parole staff toward inmates who are fathers; the common attitude that "fathers don't count"; lack of modification of support orders upon incarceration; the effect of conviction—especially a drug-related conviction—on a father's ability to secure housing and employment; distance of the prison from the father's family or community; conflict with the children's mother(s)/caregiver(s); public systems that make it difficult or confusing to modify support orders;

inadequate skills or education to attain employment; and being overwhelmed by the process of transitioning from prison and sudden responsibilities.

Other obstacles took the form of questions. What, for instance, is the role of corrections in supporting a father's involvement with his children and family while incarcerated? How do an incarcerated father's short-term goals differ from his long-term goals, and what are the obstacles to each? What is the relationship between the father, his children, and his extended family? What family supports are available to him?

Finally, other obstacles were expressed as what is lacking—a lack of contact with his children; of substance abuse treatment; of a connection to community-based transition programs; of support for transition programs; of life skills; of health coverage; of transportation; of family support or family preparation for release; of family case management; of interdisciplinary service teams; of coordination between systems (e.g., corrections, child support enforcement, parole, labor, and education); and of paternity establishment.

Support Plans for Incarcerated and Ex-Offender Fathers: Participant Innovations

Participants devised a number of interventions that would alleviate the barriers described above. Almost every group reported that case management, community involvement, a continuum of care, family involvement, and family case management would help fathers involved in the criminal justice system assume their parenting responsibilities from incarceration through post-release.

Under one group's plan, intake assessment upon incarceration would be more rigorous than current practices in most prisons and include information on the following areas: educational needs; substance abuse; criminal history; family support and obligations; family and social contexts and environments; mental health; prior experience with counseling; and vocational skills. Other groups suggested that more community-based organizations should have access to inmates, so that they can establish contact with outside supports to which they can turn upon release. One group wanted inmates to be encouraged to develop attainable goals while incarcerated, as part of overall life skills training.

Others offered specific ideas for prison- and community-based training, including: a stronger focus on children so that training for fathers is developed with the explicit purpose of improving the lives of children through conflict resolution and anger management; financial planning; more rigorous pre-release training; a cognitive behavioral training approach to explore "deficits" brought on by circumstances such as the absence of an inmate's own father; and crisis support planning.

Case Management and Service Coordination

The working session was designed to encourage participants to imagine "best possible" worlds for fathers involved in the criminal justice system. The resounding call from all groups was for improved service coordination and case management for incarcerated and ex-offender fathers and their families, from incarceration through post-release. Many acknowledged the difficulties case management might entail. For instance, which agency or organization would coordinate services and be responsible for case management? How would the quality of referrals be ensured? How would success be measured? How would case managers engage distant families? Even when encouraged to "think outside of the box," participants stressed that case management and service coordination are what these representatives from various agencies and organizations envisioned.

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ONLINE RESOURCES

Center on Fathers, Families, and Public Policy
http://www.cffpp.org

Charles S. Mott Foundation
http://www.mott.org

Kids Count Data Online
http://www.aecf.org/kidscount/kc2000

Maryland's Initiative for Fathers and Families
http://www.dhr.state.md.us/csea/father/initiat.htm

National Conference of State Legislatures
http://www.ncsl.org

New Jersey Child Support Campaign
http://www.njchildsupport.org

Osborne Association
http://www.osborneny.org

Partners for Fragile Families
http://www.npcl.org/pff/

Pennsylvania Fatherhood Initiative
http://www.state.pa.us/agency.html

Vera Institute of Justice
http://www.vera.org

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